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Saudi Arabia

Biotechnology

Saudi Ministry of Agriculture Issues a GMO Labeling Requirements 2003

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Report Highlights:

The Saudi Ministry of Agriculture issued a decree to impose a GMO labeling requirements on imported and locally produced feed grain, fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products commencing from early next year.

Includes PSD changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
Riyadh [SA2], SA

On March 9, 2003, the Saudi Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) issued a circular to all Saudi Chambers of Commerce asking them to inform importers of its decision to impose GMO labeling requirements per a Ministerial decree number 88631 on all imported and locally produced Genetically Modified animal feed, planting seed, fruits, vegetables and other products which fall under the authority of the MOA.

The decree # 88631 dated 4/12/1423H (Feb. 5, 2003) was based on the recommendations of the Saudi Food Safety Committee which is made up of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Agriculture, the King Abdul Aziz City for Science & Technology and the King Saud University.

The Ministry said that the decision was also based on the fact that the world countries have not yet agreed on the procedures, regulations as well as scientific and technical guidelines governing the world trade of genetically modified agricultural products. As such, the decree was issued to enable the Ministry to regulate the entry of animal feed, planting seed, fruits and vegetables and other products to the Kingdom effective from the end of January 2004. It is worth mentioning that the importation of prepackaged foods including rice, red meat, poultry and fishery products are regulated by the Saudi Ministry of Commerce (MOC). The MOC, implemented its GMO labeling decree number 1666 on imported and locally processed foodstuff on December 1, 2001.

Following is the summary of the Ministry of Agriculture's GMO Labeling **decree # 88631**:

I. A label to be placed on agricultural genetically modified agricultural products which fall under the authority of this Ministry. Below are the products covered by the MOA decree:

- i** Fresh fruits, vegetables and dates
- i** Cereals used as fodder for animals such as barley, durra, millet, soybean, chaff, straw and the harvest of all its types.
- i** Planting Seed
- i** Agricultural transplants and decorated plants

II. Bilingual Labeling: A triangle should be drawn and on it the text should read "Contains Genetically Modified Product (s). The GMO statement must be clearly written in Arabic and English languages with an ink color different from that of the main product tag.

III. Health Certificate: GMO products or genetically engineered products which are exported to Saudi Arabia must have been approved in the country of origin for consumption. Each shipment must be accompanied by a health certificate issued by a government agency stating that the GMO ingredient (s) used in the foodstuff is approved in the country of origin (United States) for human or animal consumption.

IV. All imported GMO products must conformed with the legal (Shariaa) and moral rules applied in the Kingdom and comply with all pertinent Saudi Arabian standards and specifications.

V. The decree bans imports of GMO animals, birds and their by products.

VI. The decree shall apply on all genetically modified imported and locally produced agricultural products after the elapse of 12 months from date the decree was issued (2/5/03). Products that will not meet the requirements of the decree will not be allowed to enter the Kingdom after the expiry of the grace period.

VII. The Animal and Plant Quarantine Department of the MOA is given the responsibilities of implementing the requirements of the decree number 8863.

Although the MOA decree did not specify the kind of the GMO testing required and set no threshold level to determine whether a product contains GMO ingredient(s) or not, ATO has learned from the Director General of the Animal and Plant Quarantine Department of the Ministry that GMO testing requirements and certificates approved by the Saudi Ministry of Commere will be implemented at the end of the grace period given by the MOA.

In December of 2001, the Ministry of Commerce approved the PCR Real Time Method for GMO testing and set a 1 percent threshold to account for cross contamination and appointed King Faisal Specialist Hospital & Research Center (KFSH) to do the GMO testing on imported and locally produced foodstuffs. However, due to lack of trained personnel and inadequate lab equipment, the hospital subcontracted with Genetic ID a London, England based firm to do the tests until it can do them locally. Saudi importers are charged a testing fee of \$480 USD per product sample tested. It takes 3-4 weeks for the importer to receive the test results. If the test results reveal more than 1 percent GMO ingredient and the product is not labeled as GMO, the product is either destroyed locally or re-exported to the country of origin.

Last year, the Saudi Ministry of Commerce agreed to accept health certificates issued by state departments of agriculture instead of the previous requirement that the certificates must be issued by a Federal Government agency such as USDA and FDA. The Ministry has reiterated its refusal to consider any health certificate issued by exporting companies or other private organizations including the notary public. ATO provided the MOC with copies of GMO certificates issued by some departments of agriculture and asked the Ministry to evaluate if any of the certificates met the current Saudi GMO requirement. After studying copies of the certificates provided, the MOC approved the following export certificate language issued by one state department of agriculture in lieu of the previous requirements that specified federal government agencies as the sole providers of legitimate GMO health certificates. As such, similar certificates shown on the next page issued by any state department of agriculture would be now accepted by the Saudi port officials.

Certificate of Health & Free Sale, Sanitary and Purity

"I, (name of state official), do hereby certify that (name of U.S. company and address)

operates a food manufacturing plant which is inspected at regular intervals by full-time inspectors employed by the (name of state) Department of Agriculture. The facility's equipment and raw materials, as well as the processing and packaging procedure, meets all sanitary requirements and the operation is in good standing in every respect. We certify the following listing of products as freely, and without qualification, sold and used in the United States of America (USA).

This product may contain genetically modified organisms.

(put name of product)

This certificate shall be good for one year from the date of issue.

This certificate is not to be construed as either an expression of implied warranty of any products of said company, nor shall it be used for propaganda, advertising, or other simple purposes.

This certificate shall not be altered after the issue date, or it will be deemed void by the (name of state) Department of Agriculture and the undersigned.

(The certificate should be issued with the seal of the State Department of Agriculture, notarized, and signed by the appropriate State Department of Agriculture official)."